

# Educator Policies & the Every Student Succeeds Act

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The difference that an effective teacher can make in the trajectory of a student's life is often discussed and well documented. Research indicates that teachers are the most important school-based factor for student growth and achievement. A [single year](#) with an ineffective teacher can cost a student up to one and a half years' worth of achievement. On the other hand, five consecutive years with an effective teacher could nearly close the achievement gap.

In the 16 years since the initial passage of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), the body of research around the impact of teachers and state policy experimentation on how to measure effectiveness have grown. This brief traces the evolution from the "Highly-Qualified Teacher" provisions of NCLB to the teacher evaluation systems of the 2011 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) waivers to the present *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), which refrains from being prescriptive on how states choose to address this question, but does offer several opportunities for innovation and experimentation.

# 2001-2017: An Evolution of Educator Policies

## 2001-2008 | Priority: Qualification

In 2001, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* was reauthorized as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). Among the general public, NCLB is probably best known for spurring the implementation of statewide standards and assessments and the reporting of the results of those assessments annually. But the law also introduced a new term to the policy discussion: **highly-qualified teacher (HQT)**.

**Highly-Qualified Teacher** (n.) An educator who meets the following three requirements: 1) Holds a bachelor's degree; 2) Holds full state certification or licensure; and 3) Demonstrates subject matter competency.

NCLB required that all core academic subjects be taught by teachers who were “highly qualified,” but left it to states to individually define the term. [Evaluations of NCLB](#) implementation found that most teachers met the HQT requirement as determined by their states—and also that those who did not were more likely to be found in special education, science, and schools serving higher concentrations of low-income students. In addition, because the specific criteria were set by the state, the definition varied widely, particularly when it came to the bar for subject-matter competency.

A [2007 survey](#) conducted by the Center on Education Policy found that a majority of state and district leaders reported that the HQT requirement had minimal or no impact on student achievement. To explain this finding, critics would point to the focus on *inputs* rather than *outputs*.

### ESSA Check



Under the **Every Student Succeeds Act**, the *Highly-Qualified Teacher* requirements are eliminated beginning in the 2016-17 school year.

ESSA does not set a minimum requirement for entry into the teaching profession. States may set standards for certification and licensure as they see fit.

## 2009-2015 | Priority: Effectiveness

The conversation began to change from the importance of inputs to outputs, and in 2009, TNTP (then known as The New Teacher Project) released a report that added urgency to the discussion around teacher qualifications and effectiveness: [The Widget Effect](#).

For policymakers and education leaders who felt an urgent need to ensure that all students were taught by an effective teacher, the report rang an alarm bell: Under the existing evaluation systems, more than 99 percent of teachers received a “satisfactory” rating under the binary rating system that had been commonly used.

The conversation changed again. No longer focused on inputs or binaries, stakeholders began to explore how to define and measure *effective* teaching—in particular the impact that teachers have on their students’ achievement and growth.

These policies were pushed ahead by incentives from the U.S. Department of Education, beginning with the Race to the Top competition in 2009 and followed by ESEA flexibility waivers in 2011 (see box on next page).

As a result, most states have moved towards evaluation systems that:

- » Include multiple levels of performance classification;
- » Require more frequent evaluation of all teachers; and
- » Incorporate multiple measures, including student achievement.

**ESSA  
Check**

*Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, states are not required or incentivized to implement educator evaluation systems.*



*States that received waivers from ESEA are no longer required to adhere to the systems they proposed.*

### Federal Incentives for Teacher Evaluation Systems

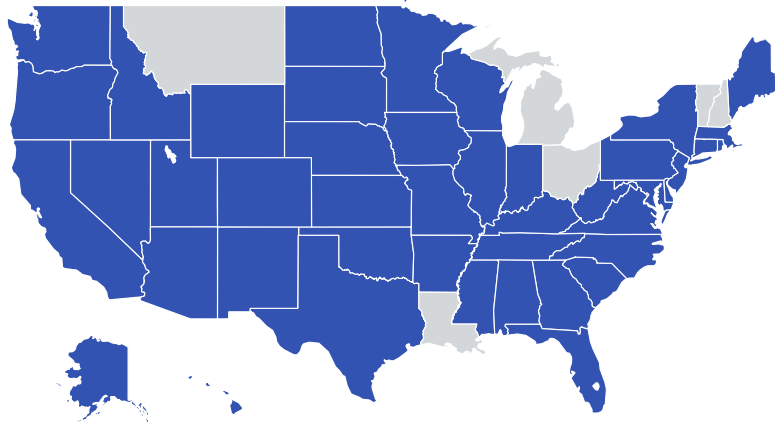
Beginning in 2009, many states modified or created legislation regarding the evaluation of teachers in response to federal initiatives like *Race to the Top* (RtT) and ESEA flexibility waivers. Both the RtT [rubric](#) and the [guidelines](#) for ESEA flexibility emphasized the significance of **linking annual teacher evaluations with measures of student growth**.

As a result of these incentives, states have moved towards systems that include multiple levels of performance classification, require more frequent evaluation of all teachers, and incorporate multiple measures, including student achievement. The number of states requiring annual

evaluations of all teachers increased from 15 states in 2009 to 26 states in 2015; 44 states require annual evaluations of all new, probationary teachers.

In the absence of these incentives for certain aspects of teacher evaluation systems under ESSA, some state legislatures are proposing bills that reduce the frequency by which teachers are evaluated or eliminate student growth requirements for determining effectiveness.

#### States that Require Annual Evaluations of New Teachers



Source: National Council on Teacher Quality

## 2015 & Beyond | Priority: State Control

With federal incentives for teacher evaluation removed through the passage of ESSA, state leaders now have greater control and flexibility to decide how best to continue (or if to continue) implementing and improving their evaluation systems. ESSA does, however, still contain a range of provisions that relate to teachers and school leaders. As states move from plan development and into implementation and refinement, there are several key opportunities to address teacher and school leader effectiveness within the law.

# Key Opportunities for Enhancing Educator Policies

## Equity

While ESSA moves away from the “highly-qualified teachers” provisions in NCLB, the new law draws attention to an equity issue that has continued to stump states and districts: the distribution of teachers. Often, one finds that the strongest teachers are not necessarily in the schools that need them the most. *ESSA requires states and districts to report disparities that result in low-income students and minority students being taught by ineffective, inexperienced, or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than other students.* This requirement presents an opportunity for states to address any inequities in access to effective teaching and begin to address imbalances that have likely existed for years.

### **How does my state define and measure teacher effectiveness?**

While there are no longer requirements for evaluation systems linking teacher effectiveness with student growth or performance, states will need to carefully design measures and definitions of effectiveness (and ineffectiveness), as well as define “inexperienced” if they are truly to identify and address imbalances in teacher distribution across their states. NCTQ provides best practices and state exemplars for states to consider around these issues in their [ESSA Educator Equity Best Practices Guide](#).

### **How will my state use this data to balance the distribution of teachers?**

States should explore any existing programs they may have, as well as programs instituted by districts to recruit and retain effective teachers in traditionally under-resourced schools and areas of the state. In particular, states should consider how the opportunities around teacher preparation and school leadership (below) can be targeted to increase equity.

## School Leadership

School leadership has been found by researchers to be second only to teaching in its impact on children’s learning outcomes. The successful transformation of low-performing schools will require a sufficient supply of school leaders with the requisite skills, knowledge, and dispositions to effect meaningful change. Research has shown that frequent turnover of principals in underperforming schools serves to create instability and undermine improvement efforts. For that reason, it is not enough to simply prepare and hire talented leaders; policy solutions must be developed to ensure that effective principals remain in high-need schools for the long term.

Under ESSA, states have the ability to prioritize school leadership through Title II monies, including a new option that allows them to reserve additional money for state-level school leadership support (see box on next page). A variety of activities that serve to improve the principal pipeline, including the development or expansion of preparation academies and residencies. States can also consider using Title I School Improvement Funds to support activities to include school leaders.

### ***How can my state prioritize school leadership?***

If your state has not used Title II dollars for school leadership improvement in the past, you are not alone—historically less than four percent of Title II funds have been spent on development for school leaders. Allotting state Title II dollars to cultivating your principal pipeline is a wise investment, particularly for regions that have had a historically hard time finding and retaining effective principals in high-needs schools. New Leaders identifies potential paths for improving school leadership, along with exemplars and key questions for policy leaders in [Prioritizing Leadership: Opportunities in ESSA for Chief State School Officers](#). Looking for more? RAND, in partnership with the Wallace Foundation, offers guidance on how to utilize ESSA in [School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act](#).

### **Recruiting, Preparing, and Retaining Excellent Teachers**

Key to improving student outcomes is establishing a professionalized teaching workforce that is supported at every stage of their career. ESSA authorizes states to use Title II funds in ways that can create sustainable frameworks for excellent teaching, including:

- » Establishing or expanding teacher and **principal preparation academies**, including teacher residency programs and school leader residency programs.
- » Assisting local education agencies in developing **human capital management strategies**, including career ladders, mentor and induction programs, and/or redesigned roles.
- » Providing **professional development** for all teachers (previously funds could only be used for core academic subjects).

### ***What are preparation academies and what would one look like in my state?***

Teacher preparation academies operate with more autonomy than traditional teacher preparation programs and would be freed from having to satisfy certain state requirements. Nevertheless, academies would still be held accountable for producing candidates with demonstrated records of improving student achievement. A significant part of an academy's curriculum is hands-on clinical preparation, also known as a "residency." States may use up to 2 percent of their Title II dollars to establish or enhance preparation academies. The National Center for Teacher Residencies has created a [toolkit with policy recommendations](#) for states looking to bolster teacher residences through ESSA.

### **Title II At a Glance**

Title II provides grants to State Education Agencies and subgrants to local educational agencies to:

- » Increase student achievement consistent with challenging state academic standards;
- » Improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other school leaders;
- » Increase the number of teachers, principals, and other school leaders who are effective at improving student academic achievement in schools; and
- » Provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders.

Title II, Part A Funds are distributed to states using a formula that weights both students in poverty and total student population.

- » Under ESSA, the formula will transition to weight poverty more and overall population less.
- » Of a State's Allocation:
  - » 95% is directed for district activities.
  - » Up to 5% may be used for state activities.
  - » ESSA will allow states to set aside an optional 3% for statewide leadership activities. (92% local, 8% state)

## ***How can my state redesign incentives and structures to keep great teachers in every classroom?***

In most states and districts, systems are designed such that high-performing teachers are incentivized to:

- 1) teach in high-performing schools and/or
- 2) leave the classroom to take administrative roles.

This is because the current step-and-lane salary schedule rewards teachers for degree and experience but fails to compensate for a teacher taking on additional challenges and responsibilities. States can use their Title II funds to support the development of career ladders like [Opportunity Culture](#) and create incentives to teacher in high-needs schools.

## **Looking Ahead**

The effectiveness and distribution of teachers will continue to be an issue that states and districts grapple with, particularly for states with higher numbers of rural and/or low-income students. Compounding this issue is the supply of school leaders with the requisite skills, knowledge, and dispositions to effect meaningful change. As states move from ESSA plan development into implementation, and eventually refinement, they must continue to push for equity in access to highly effective educators and school leaders.

As state and local-level policymakers search for ways to improve the lowest-performing schools, they should consider strategies like those above to ensure that efforts to redistribute effective teachers and leaders are sustained in such a way as to facilitate institutional stability and lasting improvement.



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